

Wind farm to generate electricity and tax base for city, school district

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Next year, the wind rushing through Spanish Fork Canyon will do more than disrupt golf games.

It's going to generate electricity, as well as money, for the city of Spanish Fork and Nebo School District.

Construction quietly began in October on a wind farm at the mouth of the canyon, to the east of the Fingerhut distribution center. Tracy Livingston, chief executive officer of Wasatch Wind, said the project should be operational by June at the latest, providing electricity for Rocky Mountain Power.

"It will be a good example of the benefits of wind turbines," Livingston said. The project should also help Spanish Fork with extra tax revenue and the prestige of being a Utah city on the cutting edge of renewable energy.

"It's just kind of cool to be the host of the first wind-farm project in Utah," Mayor Joe Thomas said.

Currently, the only other wind farm is at Point of The Mountain. Those wind turbines, visible from Interstate 15, generate electricity for Camp Williams. But the 660-kilowatt turbines are not as large as the ones near Spanish Fork.

Livingston said that project consists of nine 2.1-megawatt turbines to generate nearly 19 megawatts of electricity - enough to serve 19,000 average-size homes - that will be sold to Rocky Mountain Power. The turbines will be mounted on 470-foot towers.

Livingston said the canyon is a more ideal site for a wind farm than Point of the Mountain, because its winds are consistent and stronger than Point of the Mountain breezes.

But there's more to the project than just generating electricity. Livingston said it will help by reducing dependence on fossil fuel, which in turn will help stabilize prices.

Since wind is free, Livingston said power consumers will not be subjected as much to the price swings of coal and natural gas, which are used to power most of Utah's electric plants. Wind power is one of the options the governor's energy task force has proposed.

It also has the potential to reduce air pollution. Wasatch Wind estimates the reduction in sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxides and carbon dioxide from the plant each year would equal 11,377 cars being taken off the road.

To get the plant going, the city had to offer Wasatch Wind a 70 percent property-tax rebate for the first 10 years. Thomas said the agreement was a good deal for the city and the Nebo School District.

"Part of the land is owned by Spanish Fork City. The land would have sat there undeveloped," Thomas said. "It's certainly a win for the tax base in the county."

But the biggest winner, Thomas said, would be the school district. It will receive nearly \$5 million in property taxes in the first 40 years and \$3.6 million every 20 years thereafter.

Chris Sorensen, Nebo superintendent, said that is money the district wouldn't have received otherwise.